



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 10**

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OFFICE OF  
WATER AND WATERSHEDS

*Sent via electronic mail*

July 24, 2015

Mr. Jason Berkner  
Project Manager  
Regulatory Division  
US Army Corps of Engineers  
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Dear Mr. Berkner:

It was good to meet you and the new US Army Corps of Engineers and AECOM team during the July 8, 2015, Chuitna workshop in Anchorage. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Impact Summary Table for the Chuitna Coal SEIS Project.

We offer the following general narrative comments as well as individual discreet comments in the enclosed table.

The impacts analysis should provide as much accuracy about project impacts as the data will support, and any uncertainty should be clearly stated. The impacts analysis for each resource category should contain sufficient detail, analysis, data, and discussion of project impacts (beneficial and adverse) to quantify those effects in a consistent manner and characterize them as significant or not, based on the intensity and context of the impact. The Summary Table does not currently contain any consistent contextual information or concluding statements of impact significance. To determine significance, the severity/intensity of the impact must be examined in terms of the type, quality and sensitivity of the resource involved; the location of the proposed project; the duration of the effect (short- or long-term) and other considerations of context. Significance of the impact will vary with the setting of the proposed action and the surrounding area. Quantitative data regarding the geographic (XX acres/YY miles) and temporal extent (1-year, life-of-mine, and permanent) of impacts (i.e., severity/intensity) must be clearly and directly related to the context in which they are occurring. A low or high intensity impact may or may not be significant depending on the context in which it is occurring. Many of the quantitative statements of impact in the Summary Table are not tied back to statements of significance or effect but simply quantitative values of loss/alteration. For instance, does the direct loss of XX acres of wetlands for YY years (intensity) constitute a significant impact in the context of the Chuit watershed (context)?

*Context* means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action such as the Chuitna Coal Mine, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant.

*Intensity* refers to the severity of impact. The intensity or severity of impacts needs to be clearly outlined using the available quantitative data and comparing it with the following metrics:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.
2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.
3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.
4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.
5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.
7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.
8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.
10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Clearly defining the context and intensity of impacts provides for a consistent underlying rationale for concluding statements of impact significance.

There is a great deal of overlap between the resource categories in terms of project impacts and many impacts will occur over several resource categories at different spatial and temporal scales. The cause-effect chains of these impacts should be carried to their logical conclusions, with the significance of each impact being identified. For example: a temporary change in the hydrograph of Stream 2004 may be significant, while permanent hydrograph changes in the greater Chuit may be less than significant. Changes in water quality, both temporary and permanent, may be less than significant from a drinking water perspective, but significant from an aquatic life use perspective. The permanent loss of aquatic habitat may be significant, while the permanent alteration of aquatic habitat may be less than significant. The loss of fish production may be significant in the context of the Chuit and its tributaries, while the economic loss of commercial use in Cook Inlet may be less than significant. The cultural effect from the loss of human use may be significant to cultural and subsistence users, but may be less than significant for sport users, etc.

Per our discussions during the workshop in June, it is our understanding that the SEIS will analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, including the no action alternative. However, we are unclear from the discussions or Summary Table if the indirect and cumulative impacts of the reasonably foreseeable future actions will also be analyzed in the impacts analysis section of the SEIS. We encourage a robust analysis of the indirect and cumulative impacts of

reasonably foreseeable future actions. At a minimum, the indirect and cumulative impacts from the development of the adjacent coal leases within the Chuit watershed should be disclosed in the SEIS impacts analysis. We would also encourage disclosure of the indirect and cumulative impacts that would result from all reasonably foreseeable future actions previously identified, including the reasonably foreseeable future development of the other coal leases in south central Alaska that may be facilitated/induced by the development of the export infrastructure at Ladd Landing.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to working with the US Army Corps and AECOM on the development of a robust SEIS.

Sincerely,

/s/

Jamey L. Stoddard  
Project Manager

cc: Kathy Tung, AECOM

Enclosure: EPA Comments on the 7/8/2015 Chuitna Coal SEIS Project—Impact Summary Table